

CORNELL 4-H CLUB BULLETIN 109



Understanding
Club Members

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Guiding the 4-H Club : Number 1

Understanding Club Members

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Your Importance as a Leader

The work of the 4-H Club opens many doors for young people. As a 4-H Club leader, you have an important job. You can help your club members to set high ideals for themselves. You can help them find their goals—but never try to set the goals for them. You may counsel them, but do not try to manage them. You cannot make a person do what *you* want him to do. If you try to make a boy or girl carry out *your* goals, you may warp their personalities.

Help the 4-H Club member to find his goal, but do not set the goal for him

Your job is to teach, not to govern; to guide, not to control. Let young people take responsibility, and gradually reduce your control as they learn to make decisions for themselves. It is sometimes hard for leaders to "let go" and to give club members increasing freedom. But your work as a leader is to teach young people to manage themselves without you, so that they may learn to live as adults.

Understanding Club Members

How often do you say to yourself: "What makes John act that way?" or "Why does Mary seem so different today?"

An understanding of teen-age behavior prepares you to guide young people. These questions may help you to study each one of your club members:

Is each club member learning to be a free but responsible individual? What does he want to do? What problems is he facing? How can I help him?

The way a young person acts in your 4-H Club depends upon his own thoughts, needs, and desires; the influences that are molding him, at home and in the community; and the way he has learned to get along with the people around him.

Is Each Club Member Learning To Be a Free but Responsible Individual?

The better you can know each club member in his home and with his family, the easier it will be for you to understand him in the club. It will be helpful for you to know the following:

1. Do his father and mother give him chances to make decisions for himself or do they decide most things for him?
2. Does he get along well with his brothers and sisters?
3. Has he learned to share responsibility at home?
4. Is he permitted some experience in handling money, especially in relation to his 4-H project?
5. Does he have a chance to play as well as to work?
6. Does his family have a healthy attitude toward his interest in the other sex? Do they understand this interest and treat it as natural and wholesome, or do they ridicule it?

A young person who has been permitted to make his own decisions and to take responsibility in his family will participate more easily in the 4-H Club than one who has been prohibited and restricted. Boys and girls who have not been given a chance to manage themselves at home need especially to have this experience provided through the 4-H Club.

What is the family's attitude toward the child?

What Does Each Club Member Want To Do?

How a young person feels about himself depends partly on what people expect of him as he grows up. As a child, he has generally been expected to play, not to work; to be led, not to lead; and to accept the thinking of others, not to think for himself.

Suddenly, as he grows up *physically*, adults expect him to act like a grownup in *all* ways. They expect him to work, not play; to lead, not to be led; and to think and decide for himself, not always to be told what to do by others.

This demand from others that he change his ways tends to confuse him. He finds that his usual way of acting is no longer acceptable; but he has not yet learned how he is expected to act as an adult.

The resulting confusion is often evident in his behavior. He sometimes seems lost in a world of dreams, paying no attention to what goes on around him. Or, he may grow restless and do much teasing and fighting. Sometimes he makes real efforts to act grown up, and at other times he drops back to childish behavior. He may be untidy and disorderly, careless about washing, or combing his hair. He may slump in posture and use bad language. He is often so pre-occupied with his own thoughts that he forgets what he was supposed to do.

His attitude sometimes changes suddenly from cooperation to rebellion. He may momentarily turn against those he loves, aggravating his mother or 4-H leader to the point of tears, and then immediately feel sorry for what he has done.

His questions often reveal curiosity about sex. His growing awareness of members of the other sex may be shown by his teasing attention toward them.

During this period, young people want to join a gang or a club. It gives them a chance to get away from home and be with other young people. They gain confidence and a "feeling of belonging" from joining in the activities of a group.

Young people want and need guidance from adults who understand them and are patient with them. They need adults to encourage them and stand by while they find out what they want to do.

As a 4-H Club leader, you can do a great deal to help young people understand themselves. Do not try to squelch their behavior. Instead, try to help each young person know clearly what is expected of him. Then let him experience the natural results of his action. If he forgets the materials he was to bring to a meeting, expect him to do the job as best he can without them.

What Problems Does Your Club Member Face?

Younger club members generally like to be with others of the same sex—boys with boys, and girls with girls. As they grow up physically, they want to be in mixed groups of boys and girls together. Young people differ greatly regarding the age at which they show interest in the other sex. Because girls

Create a natural situation for boys and girls to get to know each other

generally mature physically at a younger age than boys, they tend to show interest in boys at an earlier age and to prefer boys who are older.

Young people may show their first interest in the other sex by teasing, hair-pulling, or fighting. Later, they learn to have fun together through games and group activities. Dating by couples follows, as a prelude to marriage.

As an understanding 4-H Club leader, you will expect young people to grow in interest toward the opposite sex. Treat this interest as natural and normal. Adults should never ridicule the blossoming love interest of teen-agers. What may seem to be harmless teasing to an adult can seriously hurt and embarrass a young person whose tender heart is on his sleeve. Try to make it easy for boys and girls to be together when they wish. If both boys and girls are in your club, you have a natural situation for them to know each other. If you have only boys or only girls, you should encourage parties and social events for boys and girls together. Try to make the first mixed events socially easy for the young people, so that no one needs to invite or entertain a particular friend. At first, young people simply want to be together in a group so they can learn how to act. This experience will help them feel easy and natural in any mixed group and will contribute much toward their later happiness in marriage and family living.

As boys and girls become interested in each other, they usually want to improve their appearance and their manners. They want advice on good grooming, posture, and choice of becoming colors. They want to learn manners and social customs, particularly those related to dating. The boys want to know how to hold a coat for a girl, how to seat her at the table, and how to order a meal at a restaurant. Girls want to know how to be attractive, interesting companions.

*Encourage programs dealing with
appearance and manners*

Interest in manners and grooming is usually great enough so that you need only help the club members find reference books and pamphlets and plan with them how to present the material through demonstrations and discussions.

Interest in mixed social events is usually accompanied by a desire to learn to dance. Folk games and square dances are easy to learn and provide good recreation for mixed groups. Perhaps several parents who dance well can teach social dancing. Boys and girls will be happier in college or in other new social situations if they have learned to dance with "the gang at home." ¶

As a young person grows up, he needs to free himself gradually from home control. And, his parents need to "wean" him gradually from their control. He has to feel he is no longer as closely protected and supervised by his parents as he was in childhood. He looks to parents as friends, not as supervisors. He learns to plan his own time, make his own decisions—to "stand on his own feet."

A ten-year-old who joins the 4-H Club may be taking his first independent step outside of home and school. Membership in the club gives him an

*Help the club member to gain
confidence in himself*

opportunity to choose activities for himself. At first, he may lean strongly on you for the protection and supervision to which he is accustomed from his parents. You can help him feel that he belongs. Encourage him to participate and do well in the club. Gradually he will gain the confidence to make his own plans and decisions and will no longer need to depend as much on adults.

It is usually difficult for parents to "let go" and allow their child to have increasing freedom. You may need to assist some parents in understanding their part in helping their child grow up. ¶

Every young person has to grow up emotionally—to understand his own feelings and to learn self-control. He finds out he cannot have a temper tantrum or knock someone down whenever he feels like it. He has to learn acceptable ways of expressing his feelings. He finds that he cannot run away from what is disagreeable. Through wider experience and information, he learns to outgrow his fears and anxieties.

Your 4-H Club can provide a variety of experiences which help young people

to grow up emotionally. You may show a club member how to control and express his feelings in an acceptable way. You may praise the progress he is making. You may help him understand and learn self-control from such 4-H Club experiences as the loss of an election, a disagreement with his best friend, or the death of his calf. ¶

Help the club member to develop self-control

work in a group without dominating it or withdrawing from it. He needs to feel sure enough of himself so that he is not self-conscious about his looks and actions. He needs to learn tolerance toward people of other nationalities, races, religions, and incomes.

Your 4-H Club can offer rich experiences in getting along with people. Encourage your club members to express their own ideas easily and well, and show them that it is equally important to listen to and respect the ideas of others. Questions, discussions, and demonstrations during meetings provide practice

with language. Dramatics, such as skits and plays, encourage ease of expression. Arrange picnics, hikes, and parties so that your club members can talk and play together freely.

Encourage the club members to respect the ideas of others

You can provide wide contacts for your club members by arranging for them to meet with other clubs, to take part in community activities, and to attend county, district, and state events, such as camps, dress revues, and demonstration days.

Although it is natural for young people to want their own close group of friends, a 4-H Club leader who permits a strong clique to bar others from joining or being happy in the club is encouraging intolerance and prejudice. You can enlarge and broaden a clique by arranging for different social groups to work together on committees or on other activities which allow them to get to know each other. You can help your club members appreciate the contribution of each one, no matter what his background may be. ¶

Every young person wants to feel sure he can earn his living. He wants to know his abilities and choose a vocation in which he can succeed. He wants to get enough preparation so that he can make good in that vocation.

The 4-H Club cannot provide the trained vocational counseling which many schools supply. But 4-H Club experience can help a young person discover his interests and abilities. Give him a chance to use varied materials and skills in 4-H projects and camp activities. Encourage him to try his abilities and to see what he does well. Through club work, a young person can learn good work habits. He can feel the dignity and satisfaction of work well done.

You can lend a ready ear when a member wants to talk about what he may

want to do as a lifework. Sometimes you may help him see some of his abilities and mention various vocations he might consider. Encourage boys and girls to get summer or part-time work which interests them so that they can try their talents and have firsthand experience.

Help them to think through the training required for the work and the amount of time, money, and effort it will take. As a wise club leader, you

will never tell a young person what vocation to follow. Although you may not be trained to give vocational guidance, you can open many doors of experience which will help a young person choose his own vocation. ¶

*Help the club member to
prepare for his vocation*

A young person needs to grow up in his thinking. He desires knowledge, questions authority, and seeks evidence. He wants to become acquainted with everything around him. He wants explanations that are soundly based on facts. From many interests, he narrows to a few that may become permanent.

*Help the club member to
think for himself*

Encourage the club member to seek

and to question the facts. Let him know that you are not an authority in every field, but that you are willing to help him find the best authority. The 4-H project offers many chances for the club member to seek facts and to do some experimenting himself. Only as he questions, and thinks and reasons for himself, and tests his reasoning with that of others, can he gain confidence in his own thinking. ¶

The 4-H Club has a responsibility to help young people find leisure-time activities. If a young person is free to try many kinds of interesting materials, he may find his hobbies, as well as his vocation. Your 4-H Club members may enjoy working with such materials as paints, dyes, fabrics, flowers, foods, herbs, plants, rocks, birds, clay, musical instruments, wood, beads, leather, cameras, butterflies, sports equipment, and others. The resourceful 4-H Club leader can help boys and girls enjoy materials that are available and inexpensive.

*Help the club member to learn
how to use leisure time*

Encourage the club member to enjoy doing things without striving for a perfect performance. Hobbies and interests may be discouraged by emphasis on high standards. Do not emphasize contests. Competition with others, by setting a standard goal, may curb what a youngster might do. Encourage the club member to take pride in improving his skill and to compete with his *own* accomplishment. Emphasize the fun of creating, and you will be preparing him to continue creative leisure-time interests throughout his life. ¶

Perhaps most of all, a young person needs a philosophy of life. He wants to develop an attitude which gives life meaning for him. He wants his own ideals and standards of conduct. He wants to find a place for himself in the world.

With the help of an understanding leader, 4-H Club experiences can be made meaningful to the young person by helping him see values and understand what causes certain results.

Live your best with your club members

Young people tend to catch the philosophy of a leader whom they admire. Is this not a challenge to live your best with your club members?

Questions for Discussion

1. At club meetings, a group of girls spend their time giggling and talking about their boy friends. What can a leader do about this? (See page 4.)
2. Last year Bob raised a fine dairy calf as his 4-H project. His father sold it and used the money himself. This year Bob attends 4-H meetings, but shows little interest in starting a project. What can the leader do about this situation? (See pages 5 and 7.)
3. A 4-H Club leader, Mrs. Gray, is discouraged because her daughter Susan, who is usually cooperative at home, is impudent and sassy with her during 4-H Club meetings. How would you help this leader understand and deal with her daughter's action? (See page 3.)
4. In a fit of temper at a 4-H Club meeting, Bill punched Don. In the ensuing fight, Bill broke a window in the schoolroom where the meeting was being held. If you were the leader of this club, how would you handle this situation? (See page 5.)
5. How can a leader help a 4-H Club member choose a vocation? (See page 6.)
6. Mary forgot to bring to the 4-H Club meeting the materials for the demonstration she planned to give on measuring flour. If you were her leader, what would you do about this? (See page 4.)
7. Can you think of any experiences in your 4-H Club which have helped a club member develop a philosophy of life? (See page 8.)

Reprinted DECEMBER 1958



Cooperative Extension Service, New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University and the U. S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. In furtherance of Acts of Congress May 8, June 30, 1914. M. C. Bond, Director of Extension, Ithaca, New York.

